

**deciphər**

HOW TO GUIDE

# Virtual Interview Guide |

Tips and advice on how to make the right impression during a virtual job interview

# An introduction to virtual interviews

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The 'job interview' is a critical stage in recruitment. It is an assessment tool that complements other steps in the hiring process and enables an employer to identify and progress strong candidates.

From an employer perspective, they are looking to determine a candidate's competency, fit and motivation. Conversely, interviews are also an important tool for job applicants.

When done well, you'll gain a better understanding of the organisation, have some clarity on the role requirements and importantly, insight into the employer's expectations in terms of performance.

If you have recently been in the job market, chances are you've also had a virtual interview.

## Are virtual interviews here to stay?

Online, video or virtual interviews have been around for some time, particularly in recruitment. It's seen as a useful tool when candidates, or participants on the interview panel, are remotely dispersed.

The global COVID-19 pandemic and opportunities for remote/hybrid working have accelerated the use and popularity of video conferencing technology – so much so that it is commonplace for many workers in their day-to-day jobs.

Recruiters and HR teams are signalling that going forward they will continue to use a combination of virtual and in-person interviews, as part of a hiring process. The reality is that virtual interviews are here to stay. Interviews are stressful enough at the best of times but conducting them in an unfamiliar environment can bring about new challenges. We're here to help with our best practice guide to virtual interviewing.

## TIPS & POINTERS | Types of Virtual Interviews

### Live Video Interview

This is an interview that happens in real time, similar to an in-person interview, however with participants connecting remotely via some form of video conferencing technology. It may be used as an initial 'first' interview and as the recruitment process progresses, there are opportunities for in-person interviews. This is the most typical kind of virtual interview that you may come across.

### Asynchronous Interview

This is relatively uncommon in New Zealand but is essentially a one-way interview where the applicant responds to specific questions online (via specialised software) which is recorded and viewed by the recruiter at a later date. It is usually used early on in the recruitment process, as a type of preliminary screening of an applicant's suitability for a role.

# The positives and negatives of 'virtual'

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## Why are virtual interviews so hard to get right?

For the majority, we're still a bit uncomfortable with virtual communication. It can be a tricky environment to navigate and particularly challenging to create a real connection with another person – think in terms of those non-verbal cues and body language that we unconsciously use to communicate with one another. And for that reason, a lot of people still prefer face-to-face meetings or interviews.

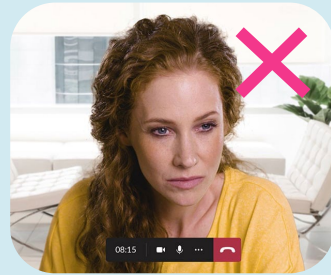
First up, the **technology** can be a big hurdle. Although having **good video skills** isn't really as daunting as it sounds. And then there's all the little details that you may not consider – are you in a well-lit room, free of background clutter and noise that's possibly distracting you as much as the interviewer?

Employers are pretty realistic in their expectations when it comes to virtual interviews – not everyone has the performance skills of a professional actor or newsreader. So don't be too hard on yourself. However, depending on the role your performance may hold a lot of weight, for example if the virtual interview is a **simulation of the job** (i.e., the role includes leadership of people in a hybrid work environment, or, it's a technical/IT role where there's an expectation of proficiency with tech).

It's our job as recruiters to advise our clients on the best option in terms of remote or in-person interviews – weighing up the candidate experience and what will be the most effective, based on the client (and role) demands.

## Surprisingly common virtual interview mistakes:

1. Background noises and distractions.
2. Avoiding eye contact or staring into space.
3. Using an unprofessional background or sitting in a messy room.
4. Leaving inappropriate tabs or apps open when screen sharing.
5. User-caused technical difficulties.



## The positives and negatives of 'virtual'

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### On the plus side

There are many benefits of virtual interviews for candidates. Importantly, it opens up a broader range of job opportunities. Previously you may have overlooked a job vacancy because of the location and assumption that it would just be too difficult to progress in the process.

Online interviews mean that employers can **widen their talent pools** – considering candidates from many different locations and relatively easily make a connection with the candidate to assess their suitability for a role, prior to the expense of travel.

The simplicity of virtual interviews can also **reduce the entire length** of the recruitment process which is a win for the employer in terms of time-to-hire and the applicant.

Virtual interviews can deliver improved outcomes in terms of diversity, equity and inclusion. From an **accessibility, health and wellbeing** perspective, online interviews offer benefits for both candidates and employers who for whatever reason may find it challenging to “meet” in an unfamiliar environment or face-to-face.

It's important to note however, that if the opportunity for an in-person interview is offered then you should seriously consider making yourself available. Conducting a virtual interview, while other applicants are meeting face-to-face, can put you at a disadvantage.



One of the big benefits of a virtual interview is that you control the environment. You're likely in the comfort of your own home, there's no commute to add stress to the situation – you can set up your space to make sure you shine!

**BLOG | Interview hack:**  
**online interviews**

Top tips from our team on how to prepare for video interviews.

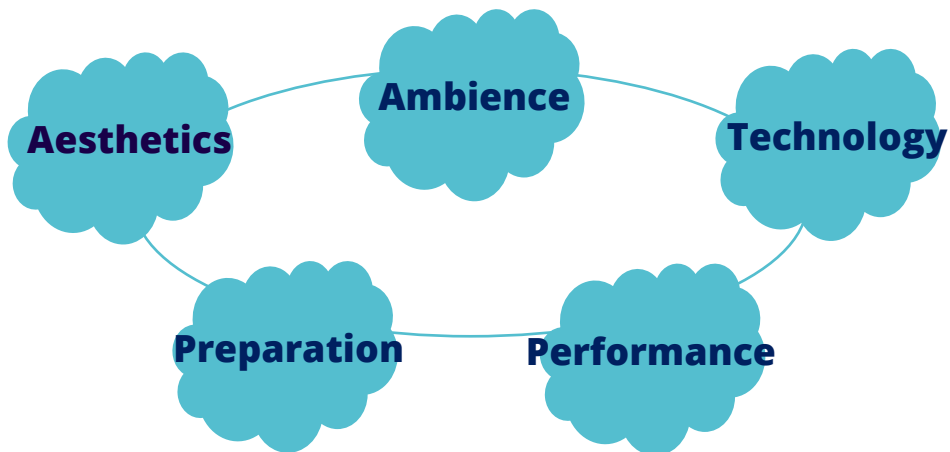
[read more](#)



## Checklist

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Remember that no one expects you to have the perfect set-up for video interviewing but there are a few simple things to consider.



### Aesthetics

Appearance matters, just like it would for an in-person interview.

- **Set up your space** - Where are you positioning yourself and what will be seen 'onscreen'? Always choose a background free of clutter; stick to something neutral to avoid distractions. Some video conferencing software will have the option to use a virtual background, however, most people prefer to see the actual background of where you are located. If in doubt, a plain wall will suffice.
- **Attire** - Dress like you would for an in-person interview, in professional attire relative to the role/industry. Try to wear clothing without patterns and the colour white; they don't do well on video. Test your outfit with your background prior to the actual interview.
- **Posture** - Sitting in a chair with back support will make it easy to maintain a good posture for the duration of the interview. And that means not sitting on a bar stool, bean bag or on your bed. Try standing if that's more comfortable for you. Aim to have your head and the top of your shoulders dominate the screen space.



# Checklist

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## Ambience

Create the right mood and atmosphere.

- **Lighting** - Pick a well-lit room, if possible. The key is having natural light (cool not warm) facing you; don't have the light behind you because it creates shadows. If that's not an option, then consider putting a lamp behind your device/camera. Even your mobile phone's flashlight can help to lighten up your face.
- **Background Noise** - Mute notifications on your device/s and put your phone on silent mode. Having a message pop-up on screen (including the noise) can be very distracting.
- **Carefully consider your location** - You want to choose a space that will have minimal interruptions. If you are at work, then consider taking a WFH day rather than conducting the interview in your car.

## Performance

Making a good impression and projecting confidence is just as important during a virtual interview.

- **Body Language** - This is key and a real downfall for most of us. Think about your mannerisms, are you fidgeting or touching things within reach? Remember to smile, nod and make hand gestures that indicate you are listening and responding in a meaningful way.
- **Eye Contact** - It is important to maintain eye contact with people while you are speaking and listening. Position your device so that the camera is at eye level. A simple tip is to put a post-it next to your webcam to remind yourself to look through the camera when you're on a video call. Or turn off the video mirroring feature so you are not tempted to look at your yourself while you're speaking.
- **Keep calm and monitor your voice** - Try to maintain a conversational pace, speaking neither too fast or too slow. Record yourself and play-back the audio to hear how you come across. Remember, we all dislike the way we sound when recorded.
- **Don't read notes** - During a virtual interview, it can be tempting to glance at your notes. But it will be obvious to others that you are reading which can come across as inauthentic. It's also an unnecessary distraction. Distil your notes down to 'Minimal Talking Points' and use as memory triggers.



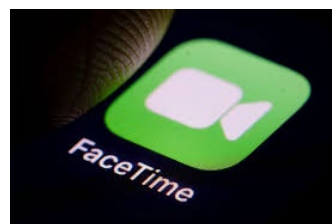
# Checklist

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## Technology

Master your technology and become an expert on whatever platform is chosen for your interview.

- **Basic Equipment** - At a minimum you'll need to have a computer (or other device), a webcam and a microphone. Your computer/device might already have an in-app camera and/or mic. If you don't have this equipment, borrow from a family member or friend. You may also want to consider using headphones, to block background noises and help you concentrate on the interview.
- **Internet Connection** - If you are unsure if your internet connection will be stable during a virtual interview then consider choosing an alternate location. For example, you could book a meeting room at your local library or service centre. If you're using a Wi-Fi connection, try moving your devices closer to the router and if there are other devices and users connected, ensure they don't take up much bandwidth during your interview. On your device, close unnecessary tabs and applications which may slow down your connection. Do a speed test if you're unsure – Google search for 'internet speed test'.
- **Remember to charge your devices** - Video calls tend to drain a computer's battery much faster compared with regular use.
- **Be prepared for the unexpected** - In preparation, do some research on troubleshooting common technical issues so you are prepared for anything.



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**PRO TIP | Internet connection: download vs upload speed**

For video conferencing, it's the upload speed that is important – you are "uploading" your video – as this affects how other people on the call see you.



# Checklist

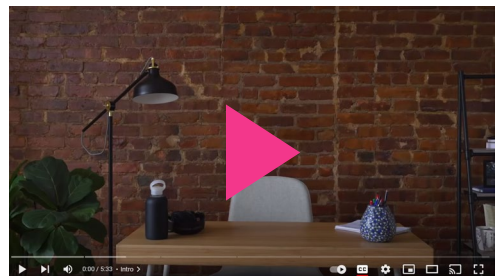
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## Preparation

Projecting a strong virtual presence can be perfected with practice.

- **Review documentation** - Make sure you have all the necessary instructions from the recruiter for example, information on how to join the call including any links, whether you need to download specific software etc.
  - **Rehearse** - Pre-record yourself and check how you look and sound. Have calls with friends to become more familiar with speaking “to” your computer.
  - **Go online** - Search for examples of good interviewing techniques, specifically related to virtual interviews.
  - **Download and test video interview software** - You may or may not have to install a tool on your computer (e.g. Skype, Teams or Zoom). Check the invite that was sent to you which should include all the necessary details.
  - **Ask for guidelines** - Check with the recruiter/employer to see if they have best practice guidelines for virtual interviews. This could help with your preparation and familiarity with the tech.
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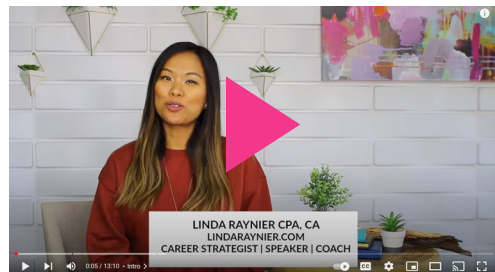
**GUIDES | Suggested  
YouTube videos for best  
practice virtual interviews**



**How to Ace Your Video Interview**  
| Wall Street Journal



**How To Ace Your Job Interview  
Over Zoom** | Forbes



**How to Look Good on Video Calls –  
Skype, Zoom, FaceTime** | Linda Raynier



# Cheat Sheet

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## What to do in advance

- Get your hardware and software sorted. Have a technology check: sound, mic, camera.
- Complete your interview preparation - Researching the company, refreshing your memory about your skills and work experiences, and practicing your answers to common interview questions. Getting the 'technical' part of a virtual interview right is great, but remember that what's really important is your presence, ability to communicate clearly and building rapport with the interviewer.

## What to do pre-interview

- Have a quick pre-check of your equipment.
- Log on to the interview at least 10 minutes in advance of the meeting time.
- Have a glass of water within reach.
- Take a pause and a deep breath, you've got this!

## What to do during the interview

- Focus on having a 'conversation', practice active listening, show interest in what the interviewer is saying and ask meaningful questions. Google the company and the interviewer to understand them better.
- Prepare for the unexpected - Don't lose it when you encounter technical difficulties, it happens to all of us and is sometimes beyond your control. If this happens, restart the software or your computer.
- Always have an alternative solution in place like a tablet or your mobile phone – just make sure you have the right software installed on the device.
- If there's an extended pause due to technical difficulties, have the contact details of the interviewer (phone number you can text or call, or an email address) readily available so you can let them know what's happening.

**BLOG | Smart ways to answer stupid interview questions**

How to respond to questions that seem pointless or generic, perhaps borderline stupid.

[read more](#)



## Need help?

Decipher Group offers a customised advisory service to assist in giving you the edge when it comes to pursuing new job opportunities. We are subject matter experts with a wealth of senior leader and governance recruitment experience. We know what recruiters are looking for.

Reach out to us today. We'd love to chat.

# Microsoft Teams Shortcuts

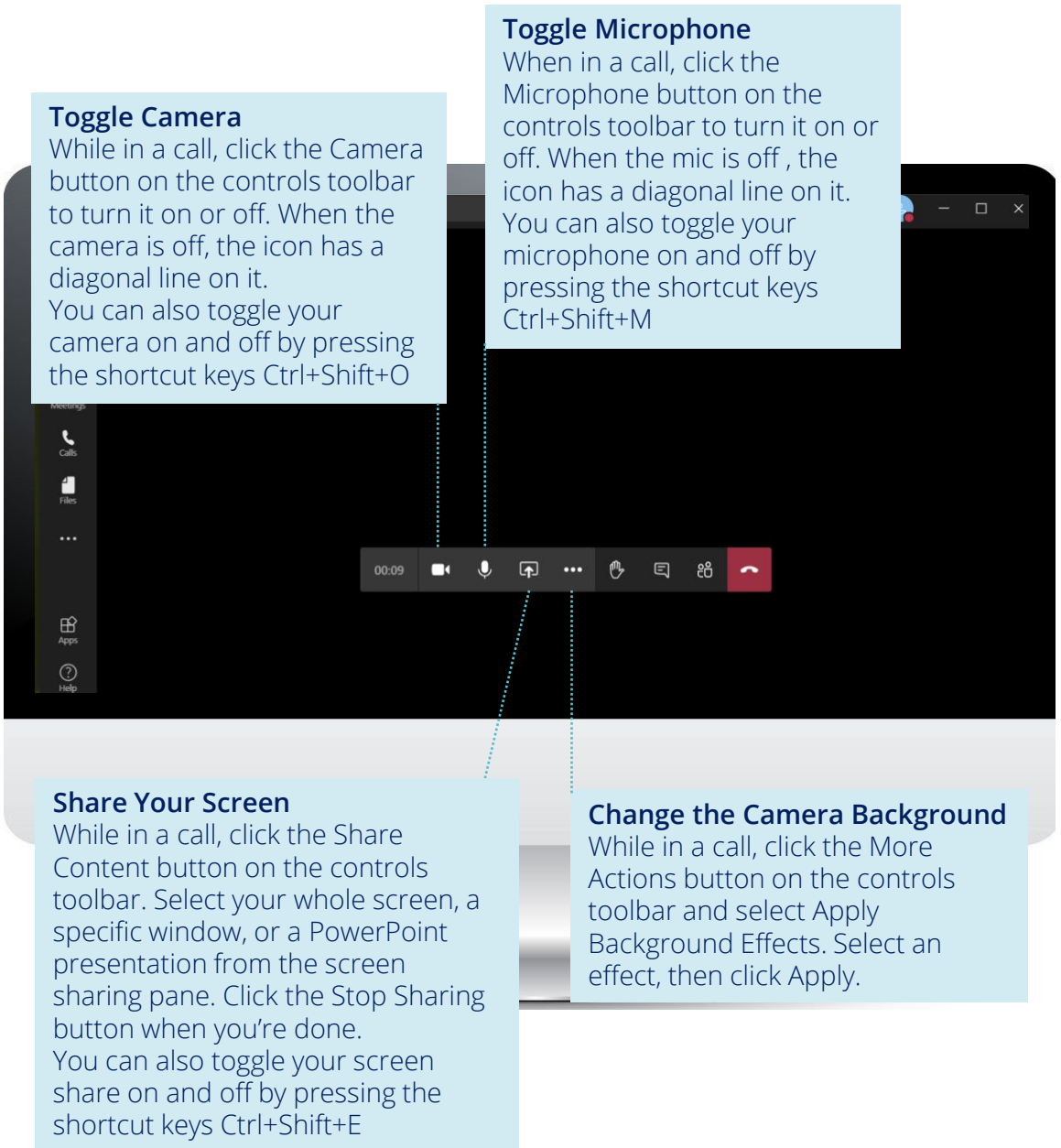
A useful guide for navigating Microsoft Teams.

## Toggle Camera

While in a call, click the Camera button on the controls toolbar to turn it on or off. When the camera is off, the icon has a diagonal line on it. You can also toggle your camera on and off by pressing the shortcut keys Ctrl+Shift+O

## Toggle Microphone

When in a call, click the Microphone button on the controls toolbar to turn it on or off. When the mic is off, the icon has a diagonal line on it. You can also toggle your microphone on and off by pressing the shortcut keys Ctrl+Shift+M



## Share Your Screen

While in a call, click the Share Content button on the controls toolbar. Select your whole screen, a specific window, or a PowerPoint presentation from the screen sharing pane. Click the Stop Sharing button when you're done. You can also toggle your screen share on and off by pressing the shortcut keys Ctrl+Shift+E

## Change the Camera Background

While in a call, click the More Actions button on the controls toolbar and select Apply Background Effects. Select an effect, then click Apply.



# Glossary

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## Key Terms

Hybrid working – A flexible working model where employees work partly in the physical workplace, and partly remotely – at home or from another workspace.

Remote working - Refers to any work that is performed 'anywhere' other than a company office or workplace, in a location of the workers choosing.

Video conferencing – A real-time visual connection between two or more remote parties over the internet that simulates a face-to-face meeting, using specialised software for example Microsoft Teams.

Virtual (online or remote) interviews – An interview that takes place remotely, sometimes over the phone, but often using technology like video conferencing and other online communication platforms.

WFH – Working from home is a variation of remote working, where the employee works from their home and may at times be required to work in an office.

**BLOG | Top  
interviewing skills for  
corporate  
professionals**

Whether you're climbing the career ladder or re-entering the workforce, check out these top tips for the next time you're under the spotlight.

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